

## Problem or Crisis?

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

June 30, 2024

Mark 5:21-43

“And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him...”

Dear Friends in Christ,

I’ve heard it said that when something bad happens to our neighbor, he has a **problem**. But if that same bad thing happens to us, we have a **crisis**. There is considerable truth in those words. Because when they are our own, our problems always seem more serious than those of our neighbor.

This morning’s Gospel contains both a problem and a crisis. What Jesus will do is never really in question. Intuitively we know He will somehow fix things. Intriguing, though, is the reaction of the crowd.

The first-century middle-eastern landscape was unlike anything we are accustomed to. There were no large “green spaces” – public parks and the like. In the villages, no front yards, or back yards either. Houses abutted each other – and the street. Quarters were always tight. Very little room to comfortably move about. And add to this the large crowds that always gathered around Jesus, and the situation comes near to pandemonium. Lots of noise. People jostling each other. Pushing, shoving, bumping. Think of a movie star or a famous athlete coming to town and you have the picture. So, the crowds’ initial reaction is understandable. Intense interest in Jesus. Curiosity. They act as we would expect.

Now comes the “crisis.” A ruler of the local synagogue approaches Jesus. But there is nothing casual here. The man falls at Jesus’ feet. His family is in the midst of a crisis. “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” “At the point of death.” That’s crisis language. And, since this man is introduced as a “ruler of the synagogue” the implication is that he deserves Jesus’ attention. And he gets it. Jesus goes with him.

But now the “problem” intervenes. A certain woman has been troubled with a discharge of blood for 12 years. It seems that her menstrual periods never really stop. The bleeding just continues month after month. Obviously this is a problem. But it’s not really a crisis. The woman isn’t dying. After all, she is alive enough to make her way through the crowds to Jesus.

But her problem is more complicated than first appears. It isn't just a matter of bleeding. In her circumstance, she is ceremonially unclean. In other words, she cannot enter the synagogue. And it's been this way now for 12 years. But there's even more. Anything she touches also becomes unclean. She creates problems for others simply by her presence. If she should she touch Jesus, He, too, would become unclean.

But Jesus is already wrapped up in dealing with a full blown crisis, remember? This woman's problem will have to wait. Or will it? Actually, no. The "crisis" of the dying little girl is put on hold so the "problem" that is besetting this woman can be dealt with. Seems strange, doesn't it? We would think Jesus would be most concerned about the life-and-death crisis confronting the synagogue ruler. But, no. The problem of this woman who has really become a no-body because of her long-running uncleanness takes center stage.

Both the man and the woman in this text become examples of faith. If Jesus will only place His hands on the little girl, the father believes the crisis will be over. The woman believes that if she can simply touch Jesus' garments her problem will be solved. Both are right in their faith.

The woman makes her way to Jesus. She comes up behind Jesus – not feeling entitled to deal with Him face-to-face. She touches His clothing. Immediately her bleeding stops. Story over, correct? Happy ending, right? Not quite. "And Jesus, perceiving in Himself that power had gone out from Him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my garments?'" The woman is put on the spot. Her hope of anonymity is over. "But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth." "Told Him the whole truth." In other words, this woman made her confession to Jesus. No doubt a confession of her problem, and a confession of her faith. How does Jesus respond? "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." Problem solved.

But now something new has happened. As one "daughter" was being healed, the other daughter – who happens to be 12 years old – that daughter has died. A problem has been taken care of, but the crisis has gone from bad to worse. Now there has been a death. Now all hope is gone. Right?

No. Never! What does Jesus say? "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." Now, notice carefully the crowd's reaction. "And they laughed at Him." They think Jesus is nuts. Dead is dead. Sleep is sleep. Any fool knows the difference. I guess so. Unless that "fool" happens to be Jesus. The crowd's reaction is the reaction of unbelievers. First great curiosity. Then equally great disdain. You see, the crowds don't get it. Unbelievers never do.

For ourselves, we categorize things. Jesus doesn't. We think in terms of "crisis" and "problem." Jesus doesn't use such language. Whatever evil afflicts people is of equal concern to Him. Thus, He can stop on His way to the ruler's home to care for the woman with the flow of blood without depriving the little girl of anything. Both will be cared for. Both will be healed. Both will live.

Crowds – and that's just another way of describing the world that surrounds Jesus and His Church – crowds are always fickle. They thrive on curiosity. Excitement. They'll flock to Jesus when there's something to see. Something exciting in the wind. But the logic of the crowd – the world – never leaves any room for the miraculous to break in. Jesus the curiosity is fine. Jesus the noble hero is great. But Jesus as God is altogether another matter. To call death "a sleep" is, to the world, silliness. Not so to Jesus. Perhaps it's from this event that St Augustine developed his picture of cemeteries as simply "dormitories of the faithful departed." And what, pray tell, does one do in a dormitory? Sleep.

Now, where are **WE** in this text? Somewhere between the synagogue ruler and the woman, I suspect. We have problems in our lives. From time to time those problems fester into full-blown crisis. At least in our minds. But Jesus is greater than any of them – all of them.

I've always wondered what to do with the number 12 in this text. If it were not important it wouldn't have been mentioned. And it certainly would not have been mentioned twice. Perhaps it has something to do with Israel. The twelve tribes. In other words, the whole of the people of God. We are presented here with individuals from both ends of the spectrum. The synagogue ruler's daughter on one end. The woman who was perpetually unclean on the other. You live somewhere between them.

You have a problem that afflicts you. Not only for the past 12 years – but ever since you were created. That problem is sin. Sin that makes you unclean. Even if it cannot be seen by others it's there. Even if others don't know about it, you do. But you are also like this woman. You have come before Jesus and you've "told Him the whole truth." You have made your confession. You do it every time you repeat those words: "I, a poor miserable sinner, confess onto to you all my sins and iniquities . . ." You know the words. You know them well. And you know the sins in your life that give substance to those words. And what happens when you confess those sins? You are forgiven. Always! Your sins are taken from you. Really, your sins are taken into Jesus, just as was this woman's uncleanness. Jesus takes on your uncleanness of sin and gives you His cleanness of forgiveness, life and salvation.

And you are like the synagogue ruler, too. You face a crisis. You face death. Not just the death of those you love, you face your own death as well. But if Jesus could deal with death in our text can there be any doubt He is capable of dealing with your impending death? You see, the physical death of a Christian is never the final word. As Jesus touched the young girl in our text and took her death into Himself, so He has touched you. That's what happened when you were baptized. Your death has been taken into Jesus. On Calvary Jesus died for you – in your place. His death has become your death. In the baptismal water, Jesus' death was bestowed upon you. His death exchanged for yours. Now you simply await the resurrection that must follow.

You see my friends, your problems and your crisis, belong to Jesus. All of them. They belong to Him because you belong to Him. And since you belong to Jesus you are free. Free from your sins. Free from death. Free from Satan's power. Free to serve God. Free to serve your neighbor. Free to live – both now and forever. Thus, like the woman in our text, you too can now “go in peace.” In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.